

# Done, for now: report of photography in Israel and Palestine, November - January 2008

3.6.08

*Chiefs of staff, prime ministers, ministers and generals are not the only ones responsible. Anyone who theoretically objects to oppression, discrimination and expulsion, but does not actively take part in the struggle and in creating a constant popular resistance to topple the apartheid regime we have created here, is responsible.*

—Amira Hass, Israeli journalist writing for *Ha'aretz*

## **FALLING**

As a friend is fond of reminding those of us who travel and witness: falling is the easy part of tumbling out of an airplane; the hard part is when the trip ends. Nearly trapped in Gaza (like most Gazans) when Israel sealed the borders several days before I was scheduled to leave (in late January 2008), I wasn't sure how long I'd remain there. That's the easy part; now I have to do something with my experiences.

## **ACHIEVEMENTS & SETBACKS**

Among the anticipated achievements of this 3 month journey to Palestine/Israel: photos and writing showing conditions in Gaza, especially in 3 hospitals; resistance in the West Bank; joint work between Israelis and Palestinians; hydrogeopolitics; and youth. Surprises included good access to the huge settlement of Ma'ale Adumim during the Annapolis talks which seemed to vow that Israel would curtail settlement construction, a tour of West Jerusalem stopping at Arab homes and the central Arab cemetery, photographing a conflict resolution workshop in the Ramallah Friends School, the Erez crossing into Gaza, the new rail line in East Jerusalem built without consultation with Palestinians living there, and several plays and concerts.

Set backs and disappointments: no work with the American Friends Service Committee in the West Bank; little work with the Friends School; not doing as much as I'd hoped with hydrogeopolitics, especially in Hebron and Ramallah; and a broken camera and lens.

## **GAZA**

My greatest joy came thru my deepening involvement with Gaza, particularly thru the AFSC youth program there. Staff was hospitable, protective, helpful with photography and most appreciative of my presence. They brought me to the heavily polluted central city beach, and to Rafah and up to the border wall between Egypt and Gaza, the scene of the later Great Break Out occurring two four days after I left Gaza. Getting into Gaza was cause for celebration, given the uncertainty of entrance.

My Gaza connection is both bane and blessing: a bane because I've committed to anchoring to this theme, returning for another trip within 1 and 1/2 years (making my 4<sup>th</sup> to Gaza), and I am fearful each time I am there. On this trip Israel attacked repeatedly, using American made Apache helicopters, F-16 fighter jets, and armed drones. I could have joined the growing list of innocents giving up their lives because of Israel errors. A blessing because of the personal connections I'm making, the trust others have in me, eliciting deep parts of their experience for me to show a public.

In my last week there, according to the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA):

*On Friday 18 January, following a surge in conflict between the Israeli army and Palestinian militants affecting civilians on both sides, Israel closed all crossings from Israel into Gaza, cutting it off from all supplies of food, medicine and fuel including humanitarian aid. Erez crossing remained open for Palestinians needing urgent medical treatment and international humanitarian workers. On 22 January, Israel's closure was relaxed but only limited goods were allowed in.*

*From 16-22 January, 23 Palestinians were killed and 70 injured as a result of Israeli aircraft fire and military incursions into the Gaza Strip. During the same period, 147 rockets and 82 mortars were fired from Gaza towards Israel, injuring several Israelis, and a sniper attack killed an Ecuadorian national in a kibbutz in Israel.*

Amira Hass estimates 80% of those injured by Israel are civilian, unconnected with any violent act. Whereas the Israeli Air Force estimates only 2-3% are civilian. From the numbers I heard while in Gaza I'd say around 30-50% of the injured were not fighters.

#### **BEGINNING & ENDING**

One unique factor in this journey, my 4<sup>th</sup> to Israel-Palestine in 4 years, is where it began and ended. Amsterdam was the first stop, meeting a friend there I'd first worked with in Palestine the year before when we pursued the hydropolitics theme, dear to both our hearts. Amsterdam was grand: peaceful, secure, relatively just. We bicycled, explored the canals, visited the Ann Frank house and museum, along with the museums devoted to Rembrandt and van Gogh. We shared the loving ambiance of this city in a region of exceptional civility. I expected those 4 idyllic days would contrast sharply with where I'd end this journey of discovery.

Gaza. The worst of the worst in terms of civility, security, environmental protection, governance, peace and justice. Yet there human beings were often at their best: gracious, welcoming, thankful, generous. Often while in Gaza I thought of Amsterdam. Occasionally in Amsterdam I imagined being in Gaza.

#### **NEXT STEPS**

Often asked why I pursue this project I answer in various ways: curiosity about the topics and region; evolving personal relationships; intention to do something positive toward fostering justice, peace, truth, and compliance with international law; realization that what I've achieved so far is minimal and needs deepening; devotion to Jesus Christ and a wish to learn from his life more directly by living where he ministered; and responding to another mentor, Martin Luther King Jr. He holds my hand as he proclaims, "Look Skip, I'm dead, you're alive, it's your turn."

My next steps are to produce materials—slide shows, print exhibits, videos, publications, and website and blog—from my tens of thousands of words and photos; then to show to others. My wish is to enhance awareness and inspire action. Open the window a little wider, let the fresh breezes of truth blow thru the stifling atmosphere of denial and self-silencing. I intend to help challenge the Zionist approach, end the occupation, and foster sharing the land of Canaan between its two (or myriad) peoples.

2008 is the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the *nakba*, or catastrophe for Palestinians, the hundreds of destroyed villages, millions of refugees—and of the founding of the Israeli state. I plan to address this theme through the year. As always I'm looking for venues for my slide shows and print displays. Please let me know of any contacts you might have.

Tall order? Let us begin where we can, do what our talents allow, follow the direction of our still small voices, despite danger and confusion. Onward, as my dearly beloved mentor Andy Towl is so fond of stating.

"GAZA: LIFT THE BLOCKADE - The Relief Convoy on its way," Saturday 26/01/08

[zope.gush-shalom.org/home/en/events/1201433012](http://zope.gush-shalom.org/home/en/events/1201433012)

**APPENDIX**

**WEBSITE (TEKSAPHOTO.ORG):**



**Amsterdam, part 1**  
October 27, 2007



**Amsterdam, part 2**  
October 27, 2007



**Ramallah: Another Voice concert & the International Solidarity Movement**  
November 1, 2007



**Jerusalem & Ramallah: Old City, Kalandia, road repairs**  
November 3, 2007



**Friends' Play Center, Amari refugee camp, Ramallah**  
November 7, 2007



**What to Do About an Illegal Highway Cutting Thru Your Land**  
November 9, 2007



**Jerusalem: a Palestinian Perspective**  
November 13, 2007



**Teaching conflict resolution at the Ramallah Friends School**  
November 14, 2007



**Lorca's *Blood Wedding* in Ramallah**  
November 17, 2007



**Bil'in: an appointment with tear gas**  
November 17, 2007



**In the West Bank with Machsom Watch and Esti Tsal**  
November 29, 2007



**Besieged Bethlehem—the Wall (Cambridge - Bethlehem delegation)**  
December 1, 2007



**Good Water Neighbors' paths**  
December 3, 2007



**Friends of the Earth Middle East—Mayors' conference**  
December 5, 2007



**Divided Jerusalem (Cambridge-Bethlehem delegation-2)**  
December 6, 2007



**Nablus & Environs, Winter 2007—The City of Fire & Region's  
Hydropolitics (part 1)**  
December 11, 2007



**Water in Salfit, sewage from Israeli settlements**  
December 17, 2007



**People to People: Cambridge-Bethlehem-3**  
December 18, 2007



**People to People: Cambridge-Bethlehem-4**  
December 18, 2007



**Walk Jerusalem to Bethlehem**  
December 24, 2007



**Bethlehem—Anticipating Christmas**  
December 22, 2007



**Light rail through East Jerusalem**  
January 1, 2008



**New construction at the Israeli settlement of Ma'ale Adumim**  
January 1, 2008



**Entering Gaza**  
January 5, 2008



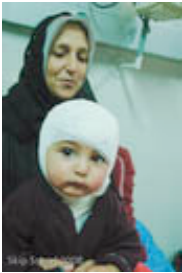
**Dinner at Ibrahim's**  
January 7, 2008



**Beach Walk—Gaza**  
January 8, 2008



**The Slaughter of the Innocents**  
January 12, 2008



**Young & Old (in Gaza hospitals)**  
January 15, 2008



**Flood**  
January 20, 2008



**Attack**  
January 22, 2008



**Our Trip to Rafah**  
January 23, 2008



**Leaving Gaza—Ramallah demonstration for a Free Gaza**

February 2, 2008



**Music at Al-Kamandjati Center, Ramallah**

February 13, 2008



**In & around Ramallah**

February 15, 2008



**Around my neighborhood in Ramallah**

February 25, 2008

**Videos:**

*Shibat treats Ramallah to a Christmas concert*

*Days of Horror, Nights of Love—Palestine 2007*

*Walking home from central Ramallah*

*The New (old) Ramallah*

And more to come

**BLOG (SKIPSCHIEL.WORDPRESS.ORG):**

**A brief note from  
Amsterdam - 1**  
October 27, 2007

*A brief note from Amsterdam where I'm laying over for four days, partly to visit a friend I worked with in Palestine in 2006, partly to respite between the insane speed of US culture and the insane injustice in Israel and Palestine.*

**A brief note from  
Amsterdam - 2**  
October 31, 2007

*The Van Gogh museum was spectacular, truly astonishing, for both M and me. I learned from the exhibit more about how he changed his color palette and why, that one of his gifts was painting bright and happy when in the depths of despair, and about his self teaching melding with infrequent instruction from others.*

**A brief note from  
Amsterdam - 3**  
October 31, 2007

*First, the museum of Dutch occupation resistance, the last museum we attended. There I learned that the resistance did not end with the first violent reprisal by the Nazis, but that strikes, sabotage, trickery and joking at the expense of the Nazis, and general non-cooperation continued unabated.*

**From Ramallah: Getting to  
Ramallah, International  
Solidarity Movement,  
Another Voice concert**  
November 2, 2007

*Finding N and the ISM office proved taxing, I nearly panicked.*

**Dreams & Visions**  
November 6, 2007

*Last night I dreamt about Ibrahim Shatali, from Gaza. He was driving the lead car in our 2-car convoy. It was raining, it was nighttime, he pulled off the road suddenly,*

**Painting a mural, Amari  
refugee camp, Ramallah**  
November 11, 2007

*Thanks to Rosi Greenberg and a contingent of internationals, we painted much of the mural Rosi designed on the entry walls to the Friends Play Center in Amari refugee camp.*

**What to Do About an Illegal  
Highway Cutting Thru Your  
Land**  
November 11, 2007

*The road, like many in the West Bank, sometimes called bypass roads, both truncates the region and illegally confiscates more land.*

**Jerusalem: a Palestinian  
Perspective**  
November 13, 2007

*The idea is that prior to 1948 Arabs lived throughout what is now called West Jerusalem, sometimes among Jews, sometimes separate.*

**Bil'in: an appointment with  
tear gas**  
November 17, 2007

*Distinguishing this day was the presence of about 10 French members of the European Parliament, in the region for some sort of mission, and tear gas, clouds and clouds of it, some claimed stronger than usual.*

**Lorca's play, Blood Wedding, in Ramallah**  
November 17, 2007

*Altho the play was in Arabic, and had a few mostly talking scenes, much was dance and a form of pantomime so Rick and I could follow the main plot: love and jealousy.*

**In the West Bank with Machsom Watch and Esti Tsal**  
November 29, 2007

*Machsom (checkpoint in Hebrew) Watch is an organization of Israeli women volunteers monitoring human rights abuses at checkpoints. There are some 500 checkpoints and roadblocks in the West Bank; the number of women is limited so they've selected the most volatile ones to observe and report on.*

**Besieged Bethlehem—the Wall**  
November 30, 2007

*Bethlehem is under siege, partly by the annexation wall which plunders land, homes, water and disrupts free travel. Also by the settlements ringing the city.*

**Divided Jerusalem (Cambridge-Bethlehem delegation, part 2)**  
December 6, 2007

*The Cambridge to Bethlehem journey intending to foster connections between people in those two regions began with two tours in Jerusalem, the old city and what is inaccurately called East Jerusalem.*

**Building justice with peace, step by step: Good Water Neighbors' Paths, a project of the Friends of the Earth Middle East**  
December 9, 2007

*In brief: the project aims to foster connections between bordering communities, in Israel and Jordan, and Israel and Palestine, thru concentration on the environment. Water plays a major role.*

**Nablus and Environs, Winter 2007: the City of Fire and the Region's Hydropolitics**  
December 11, 2007

*Traveling to Nablus from Ramallah was more terrifying than wandering around the region or the city. In Nablus the threat is kidnapping.*

**How the situation looks to me, provisionally, moment by moment, concentrating on the West Bank (recalling Mark Twain's title of a similar effort written in 1869, *Innocents Abroad*)**  
December 13, 2007

*Some feel the West Bank is relatively quiet with fewer attacks on and by the army. However, Israel is consolidating control, building the wall, patrolling the streets, while many places suffer frequent incursions and lock downs.*

**Cambridge to Bethlehem people to people delegation**  
December 19, 2007

*One highlight for several of us was the heartfelt plea by Fayrouz J. Khoury, the director of the Chamber of Commerce, for the Palestinians to be treated as human beings. His eloquence brought tears to the eyes of some of us.*

**Walk Jerusalem to Bethlehem**  
December 25, 2007

*"They set out from Bet-El [north of Ramallah]; but when they were still some distance from Efrat [Bethlehem], Rachel went into childbirth, and she had hard labor."*

<p><b>“And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby”</b> December 27, 2007</p>	<p><i>Not only had I long wished to walk from Jerusalem to Bethlehem but I’d longed to visit the site of the Grand Announcement: a Christ child about to be born, setting in motion a revolution of beliefs and practices. (I am a pilgrim at heart.)</i></p>
<p><b>Water in Salfit, sewage from Israeli settlements</b> December 31, 2007</p>	<p><i>Joining S who has been hired to research a factory in the Burkan (aka Barkan, Burqan, Barqan, etc, the spelling of many Palestine/Israel areas annoyingly flexible) industrial settlement block near Ariel, Beigel and Beigel (making food products, bagels among them), we first visited folks at the Salfit municipality and then the center for trade union workers...</i></p>
<p><b>Creative entrepreneur in the Occupied Palestinian Territories</b> December 31, 2007</p>	<p><i>A big fellow, maybe 6-4, somewhat bulky, his mouth curves graciously into a middle peak. He throws himself into talking about his many projects, as a pitcher might wind up on the mound and let loose a stinging fastball.</i></p>
<p><b>Cambridge delegation returns with stories from Bethlehem</b> January 1, 2008</p>	<p><i>The 15-person delegation from Cambridge traveled to Bethlehem in November as part of the Cambridge-Bethlehem People-to-people Project, with the mission “to bring people together for direct communication and learning about one another, the sharing of cultural expressions among all age groups, and a process of mutual education which would build on and expand existing relationships between people and organizations in both communities.”</i></p>
<p><b>Promises vs. reality: new construction in the Israeli settlement of Ma’ale Adumim</b> January 2, 2008</p>	<p><i>...workers were swarming all over the buildings, a clear testament to ongoing construction. The idea is that Olmert promised at Annapolis to freeze new construction but his words then were ambiguous. Later he promised unequivocally that all new construction at Ma’ale Adumim and some other sites would cease. We have proof this is a lie.</i></p>
<p><b>Entering Gaza</b> January 6, 2008</p>	<p><i>The questions: why are you coming to Gaza, for how long, which organization, what will you do, are you a journalist, oh an independent photographer, let’s see your photos...</i></p>
<p><b>Beach walk, Gaza City</b> January 8, 2008</p>	<p><i>This was a perfect walk for me, for at least two reasons: my photo theme of hydropolitics and my native love of water, especially wide and endless water, open vista, expansive beach, salt spray. However there were some signal differences between this Gaza beach and what I’m familiar with at home in the States.</i></p>

**Naser Pediatric Hospital,  
Gaza City, besieged**  
January 13, 2008

*Before leaving GCMHP I remembered Dr Mohanad El Helo who had guided me thru Shifa hospital last year. I phoned him. He seemed eager to participate and later called me to say, "I've gotten permits for us to photograph, let's meet today."*

**A story about my friend  
Ibrahem in Gaza**  
January 18, 2008

*Ibrahem Shatali is one of the main reasons I choose to return to Gaza.*

**Gaza Changes—2005 - 2008**  
January 18, 2008

*In my 3 trips to Gaza beginning in 2005 I can trace one major change by reporting my experiences crossing from Israel into Gaza at the northern point, Arez.*

**The Flood**  
January 20, 2008

*The major event recently was a trip with a Palestinian Hydrology Group water engineer, Bashar Ashour, to the north of the Gaza Strip, Beit Lahiya and the sewage lagoons (lagoon sounds so pleasant, romantic—where canoes with lovers comport during the evening light, kissing and promising marriage).*

**Attack—Gaza**  
January 21, 2008

*On January 19, 2008 Ibrahem, Issam, Mohamed, another friend and I visited the site of the recent F-16 attack on an unused and empty building.*

**Our trip to Rafah**  
January 24, 2008

*On January 20, Sunday, one day before I was scheduled to leave Gaza and two days before the Great Breakout from Gaza, some 1/3 million people breaking thru the wall into Egypt to find sustenance, thanks to Mosab and Ibrahem we toured Rafah.*

**Done for Now: report of  
photography in Israel and  
Palestine: November -  
January 2008**  
January 27, 2008

*As a friend is fond of reminding those of us who travel and witness: falling is the easy part of tumbling out of an airplane; the hard part is when the trip ends.*

**Boom**  
January 30, 2008

*As if in a dream, I was falling asleep in my warm bed in Gaza around midnight when I heard a loud boom—an explosion near my home. What was it? Gas explosion? From Israel? A rocket? Bomb? Missile?*

**Super Tuesday, Barack  
Obama, and Israel**  
February 5, 2008

*It is Super Tuesday (February 5, 2008); many voters have a choice, not only between candidates but whether to participate in the current election scheme.*

**Israel's New Holocaust**  
March 2, 2008

*I've composed a message drawn from the writing and photos about recent violence in Gaza from and by two friends who live there, Ibrahem and Yousef, trapped like their 1.5 million neighbors.*

And more to come